

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 HA-05 AID-05 CA-01
CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00
PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 SNM-05 DEAE-00 /102 W
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R 110441Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7421
INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
USMISSION GENEVA
AMCONGEN HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
WHITE HOUSE WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 19465

WHITE HOUSE FOR DR. BOURNE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF
SUBJECT: INDOCHINESE REFUGEE PROGRAM - LOCAL SETTLEMENT IN
THAILAND

REF: CONFIDENTIAL BANGKOK 19141

1. DURING A CALL ON PRIME MINISTER KRIANSAK, CONGRESS-
MAN BILLY LEE EVANS RAISED THE SUBJECT OF INDOCHINESE
REFUGEES. HE COMMENDED THAILAND ON THE HUMANITARIAN
ROLE IT HAD PLAYED IN RECEIVING THESE UNFORTUNATE PEOPLE,
AND ASSURED THE PRIME MINISTER THAT THE US WOULD CONTINUE
TO WORK TO ASSIST THAILAND IN MEETING THIS PROBLEM. HE NOTED
THAT THIS BURDEN HAD COME TO THAILAND MORE BY VIRTUE
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OF GEOGRAPHY THAN ANY ACTION OF THAILAND ITSELF, AND THAT
IT WOULD NOT BE FAIR TO LEAVE THAILAND TO CARRY IT ALONE.
IN MAKING THIS POINT, HOWEVER, CONGRESSMAN EVANS
WONDERED WHETHER IT WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE FOR THE RTG
TO BEGIN SOME LOCAL SETTLEMENT OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES
IN THAILAND.

2. INITIALLY, KRIANGSAK REITERATED THE STANDARD THAI POSITION TO THE EFFECT THAT THAILAND COULD NOT TAKE SUCH REFUGEES UNTIL OTHER COUNTRIES HAVE REDUCED THE SIZE OF THE LOCAL REFUGEE POPULATION TO A MANAGEABLE PROPORTION. HE ALSO STRESSED THE FACT THAT THAILAND WAS A POOR COUNTRY, WITH MANY THAI BELOW THE POVERTY LINE, AND THAT THAI CAPABILITY IN THIS RESPECT WAS VERY LIMITED.

3. RETURNING TO THIS SUBJECT SOMEWHAT LATER, AND NOTING THE PRIME MINISTER'S INDICATION THAT THE THAI COULD CONTRIBUTE TO RESETTLEMENT, CONGRESSMAN EVANS URGED THAT THE RTG CONSIDER BEGINNING THE PROCESS OF SETTLEMENT AT THIS TIME. THE PRIME MINISTER ONCE AGAIN INDICATED THE CONCERNS THAT THE RTG WOULD HAVE ABOUT BEGINNING THIS PROCESS NOW. THE CONGRESSMAN, HOWEVER, NOTED THAT SUCH AN INITIATIVE BY THE RTG WOULD BE MOST HELPFUL, BOTH IN URGING OTHER COUNTRIES TO MAKE AVAILABLE GREATER EXTERNAL RESETTLEMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDOCHINESE REFUGEES PRESENTLY IN THAI CAMPS, AND IN WINNING THE AGREEMENT OF THE US CONGRESS TO CONTINUING ASSISTANCE TO THIS PROGRAM. KRIANGSAK INDICATED IF IT WOULD BE HELPFUL WE COULD INDICATE THAT HE WAS WILLING TO CONSIDER RESETTLEMENT OF A SMALL NUMBER OF REFUGEES "WITHIN THAILAND'S CAPABILITIES." KRIANGSAK SAID THIS SHOULD NOT BE DESCRIBED AS A COMMITMENT. THE CONGRESSMAN SUGGESTED THE POSSIBILITY OF A PILOT PROJECT AND, AGAIN, THE PRIME MINISTER INDICATED QUALIFIED AGREEMENT TO CONSIDER THIS THOUGH STRESSING "ONLY WITHIN OUR CAPABILITY." CONFIDENTIAL

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AND POINTING OUT PROBLEMS HE SAW.

4. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID HE WANTED TO MAKE CLEAR THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WANTED THE BULK OF THE REFUGEES TAKEN OUT OF THAILAND. THEIR PRESENCE IN THAILAND COMPLICATED RELATIONS WITH NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES AND PRESENTED INTERNAL POLITICAL PROBLEMS. ALSO THE REFUGEES COULD NOT BE KEPT IN CAMPS TOO LONG. HE FELT THAT THEY SHOULD BE PERMITTED TO LEAVE THE CAMPS AND WORK WHILE THEY WERE WAITING REPATRIATION. HE ASSURED THE CONGRESSMAN THAT THE REFUGEES WOULD NOT BE TURNED AWAY WHILE HE WAS PRIME MINISTER AND THAT HE HAD ISSUED AN ORDER TO THAT EFFECT SEVERAL MONTHS AGO. HOWEVER, HE SAID, ANY LOCAL RESETTLEMENT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED ONLY AS A LAST RESORT AND STRESSED THAT THIS WAS A SENSITIVE DOMESTIC POLITICAL ISSUE FOR HIM.

5. LATER, SHEPARD LOWMAN, DIRECTOR HA/ORM, RETURNED TO THIS SUBJECT ONCE MORE DURING THE MEETING. HE NOTED THE CONGRESSMAN'S SUGGESTION OF A PILOT PROJECT, AND FURTHER NOTED THAT VICE PRESIDENT MONDALE, DURING HIS VISIT TO BANGKOK, HAD INDICATED A DESIRE ON THE PART OF THE US

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P 110441Z JUN 78 ZDK
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WHITE HOUSE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGKOK 19465

WHITE HOUSE PLS PASS TO DR BOURNE

TO BE OF ASSISTANCE TO THE RTG WITH RESPECT TO LOCAL
SETTLEMENT OF THESE REFUGEES. LOWMAN SUGGESTED THAT THESE TWO
THOUGHTS MIGHT BE COMPLENETARY. HE ASKED WHETHER THE PRIME
MINISTER WOULD OBJECT IF, WHEN LOWMAN RETURNS TO WASHINGTON,
WE WERE TO DEVELOP A SOMEWHAT MORE SPECIFIC PROPOSAL ALONG
THESE LINES, TO BE SUBMITTED FOR RTG CONSIDERATION. THE PRIME
MINISTER AGREED TO THIS, THOUGH WAGGING HIS FINGER AND REMINDING
US ONCE AGAIN THAT THAILAND CAN SETTLE A SMALL NUMBER OF REFUGEES
LOCALLY AND "ONLY WITHIN OUR CAPABILITY." KRIANGSAK STRESSED
THAT HE WAS AGREEING ONLY TO CONSIDER THE PROPOSAL.

6. COMMENT: WHILE OBVIOUSLY EXTREMELY SENSITIVE ON RESETTLEMENT
OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES, PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK HAS, WITHOUT
MAKING A COMMITMENT, MOVED STATE OF PLAY FORWARD. KRIANGSAK
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CLEARLY APPRECIATED CONGRESSMAN EVANS' COMMENTS THAT THE USG WAS CONSIDERING HOW TO ESTABLISH A CONTINUING REFUGEE ACCEPTANCE PROGRAM, AND IT WAS WITHIN THAT CONTEXT THAT HE ADDRESSED THE RESETTLEMENT QUESTION.

7. THIS SHIFT IN RTG THINKING HAD BEEN SIGNALLED PREVIOUSLY, MOST RECENTLY IN MEETINGS BETWEEN LOWMAN AND MAJOR GENERAL FUANGCHALOEI (REFTEL), AND WITH LT COLONEL KAMON, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, DISPLACED PERSONS OPERATIONS CENTER. KAMON WHO, IN THE PAST, HAS ALWAYS BEEN QUITE NEGATIVE ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF THAILAND BEGINNING THE LOCAL SETTLEMENT PROCESS, HAD ON THE PREVIOUS DAY DISCUSSED THIS SUBJECT WITH LOWMAN. AT THAT TIME WE SUGGESTED THAT THAILAND CONSIDER THE REFUGEES IN THAI CAMPS UNDER UNHCR CARE AS A POOL FROM WHICH ALL COUNTRIES WOULD DRAW FOR THEIR RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMS. IN THIS CONCEITION, THAILAND WOULD ALSO BEGIN AT THIS TIME TO DRAW FROM THIS POOL FOR LOCAL SETTLEMENT IN THAILAND THOSE REFUGEES SELECTED FOR SUCH A PROCESS. THIS WOULD INVOLVE A CHANGE IN LEGAL STATUS OF THOSE REFUGEES SELECTED FOR THE THAI PROGRAM, BUT NOT FOR THE INDOCHINESE REFUGEES AS A WHOLE. THIS FORMULATION, ALONG WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF A PILOT PROJECT TO THIS END FUNDED FROM THE ONE TO TWO MILLION DOLLARS FIRST MENTIONED BY VICE PRESIDENT MONDALE, INTERESTED KAMON. AT THAT TIME, HE INVITED LOWMAN TO SUBMIT A FORMAL PROPOSAL OF THIS TYPE FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF HIS OFFICE.

SINCE THE THAI DO NOT APPEAR INTERESTED IN UNDERTAKING MAJOR FEASIBILITY STUDIES, OR HIRING BATTERIES OF EXPERTS ON RESETTLEMENT TO STUDY THE QUESTION AT THIS TIME, SUCH A PILOT PROJECT WOULD APPEAR THE BEST USE FOR THE US CONTRIBUTION OFFERED BY THE VICE PRESIDENT TO ASSIST IN GETTING LOCAL SETTLEMENT STARTED.
O'DONOHUE

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